

CONGRATULATING H. BYRON MASTERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OF KENNETT, MISSOURI ON WINNING THE KIDS ARE AUTHORS CONTEST FOR "SEPTEMBER 12TH . . . WE KNEW EVERYTHING WOULD BE ALL RIGHT"

HON. JO ANN EMERSON

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2002

Mrs. EMERSON. Mr. Speaker, I come to the House floor today with the memories of September 11th forever etched on my mind. I remember thinking that the world would never be the same again after that fateful day. I was right. Now, one year later, I am touched and moved by the courage, compassion and character that people across our nation have shown in the days and months since the attack on America.

I am nearly moved beyond words by the ways our children have responded to the new challenges facing our nation. Immediately following September 11th I visited classrooms all over the Eighth Congressional district. I listened and spoke with students, teachers and parents and felt—for the first time I can remember—a bond and sense of purpose that was somehow missing in the days before.

I have never been as proud to be an American as I was when I visited with the children at those schools in my district. To be honest, I wasn't sure exactly how to talk about the tragic events of September 11th, because I wasn't sure how much they understood about why this tragedy happened to us. Instead of comforting them, they comforted me. Instead of me telling them what happened, through their patriotic songs, intelligent questions, cheers of pride, patriotic bulletin boards, and their hugs and tears, they shared what they had learned and seen.

One of those schools was H. Byron Masterson Elementary School in Kennett, Missouri. The students shared their feelings, but they did more than that. They took action. And this week, a year later, the results of their actions were heard and seen in New York City. The message from the children is one of comfort. Their story is summarized in a story reported by the Associated Press and I would like to share it with all of you.

Darlene Robertson says that on some days, the rut is the best place to be. On Sept. 12th, it was the daily rut of life in Robertson's southeast Missouri town that provided the stability her first-grade students needed in that insecure time after the terrorist attacks. "September 11 upset the routine of America, and these little children felt it," Robertson said. "That's why the rut was so important for us that day." Those students, now second-graders at H. Byron Masterson Elementary School, wrote about their experience in a book entitled, September 12th . . . We Knew Everything Would be All Right. The book, which the children also illustrated, won the Kids Are Authors contest sponsored by Scholastic Books. Now Scholastic is publishing the book and distributing it nationwide.

When Robertson first heard of the contest, she began talking with her husband about topics for a book her students could write. They knew that a lot of children would be writing about the terrorist attacks of Sep-

tember 11th, so her husband suggested September 12th as a topic. So the idea for the book was born, and in March, Robertson and her students began to recall what September 11th and 12th were like—how they had discussed what they saw on television, and how she assured them they were safe inside their classroom. "September 11th shook us all up. As a faculty, we had to be careful not to show our true feelings about the day. We had to do things just like we had been doing the day before. It gave the kids security." The book takes readers through the day after the attacks and how the students' daily routine was a comfort to them: "The sun rose again, and the students traveled to school as usual. They still had homework. And two plus two still added up to four," they wrote in the book. "On September 12th, our parents still tucked us in our warm, safe beds," they wrote. "We knew we would be all right because our parents said they loved us."

My favorite quote from the books is one that I used recently in my weekly column about September 11th. The children wrote, "We knew everything would be all right because the stars and moon came out and America went to sleep. And the next morning the sun came up again."

The students, together with their parents, were recognized for their achievement. They along with teacher, Darlene Robertson and her husband, Dennis, and Masterson Principal Elsie Heller, left for New York City early Monday morning, September 9th.

The group of approximately 40 spent three days in the Big Apple including the one year anniversary of September 11th. The trip, sponsored by NASDAQ, ended with the group taking part in the ceremonial opening and ringing of the bell at the NASDAQ market on September 11th. During their stay in NYC, the group visited various sights including every child's dream, Toys R Us, New York. They also toured the Empire State Building and the New York Public Library. And they took a trip to the company, Scholastic, whose contest made all of this possible.

Scholastic will be at H. Byron Masterson Elementary School on September 12th for a banquet, where they will present the students with medals. The school also will receive 100 copies of the book and an autographed copy of the book will be sent to President Bush.

As their teacher Mrs. Robertson said "We're just a little small town of 11,000 in the Bootheel of Missouri but here we are . . . It is an honor to be chosen."

It is an honor for me to represent these children and their families in Congress. Congratulations on this remarkable and special milestone in your lives. You children have inspired me. You have shown your compassion for others. You have displayed the true character of America. You have shown me and other parents and adults your maturity and depth of understanding about our great nation. You have given us resolve. You have given us courage. And you will help us show the world that no act of terror will ever bring us to our knees. We will be stronger than ever in the face of adversity. We will be one. We will be tougher. We will prevail.

CONGRATULATIONS TO LEAH A. CUNNINGHAM

HON. ROB SIMMONS

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2002

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Leah A. Cunningham of Niantic,

CT. Leah Cunningham was named a national winner in the 2002 Voice of Democracy Program and received the \$1,500 Department of Colorado and Auxiliary Award. Leah was sponsored by VFW Post 5849 and its Ladies Auxiliary in East Lyme, Connecticut.

I applaud the achievements of Leah Cunningham and ask that her award-winning essay be submitted into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

[From the 2001-2002 VFW Voice of Democracy Scholarship Contest]

REACHING OUT TO AMERICA'S FUTURE

(By Leah Cunningham of Connecticut)

Yiyia, what is your advice for me and my role in helping America to have a better future?

"I came to this country at only 12 years old, alone and frightened of the unraveling journey ahead. I immigrated from Greece, but I soon became a loving citizen of this great land called America. I have learned that for America to have a better future, we must trust and learn from the issues of the past."

And then, my Yiyia (which is Greek for grandma) would smile in her strong oak rocking chair, gazing out the window of her apartment. Yiyia would have faith in the youth of America and their love for a country. She had seen the beginning stages of World War I as torpedoes were launched at her boat; she had watched America slowly enter World War Two, and thankfully, she died before her eyes would witness the devastation of the worst terrorist act to ever assault American soil: The destruction of the New York trade center towers by two hijacked airplanes.

These horrific events of September 11th have sparked a new found interest in our past and pride. Have we perhaps become more aware of our duty to create a peaceful life for our youth? The idea is to reach out to America's future, enabling our children to create a better world, providing them with knowledge, insight. Someday as a grandmother, I hope to share with my grandchildren the knowledge a nation has touched my existence with. I will reach out to America's youth—empowered in good faith to help America's future.

Our nation has indeed suffered tragedy but at the same time, we have been blessed by devoted American citizens striving towards a common goal: to make America a peaceful nation. Firemen, Red Cross volunteers, policemen, and average American citizens are so diligently working in New York City, to defy evil and restore the site of utter human devastation. We have refocused our priorities, acknowledging kindness, not only kindness for our friends and relatives, but a rejuvenated sense of benevolence towards strangers and fellow Americans. I see a confident nation, converging together, providing that we will not fall, we will not falter, we will not fail in a time of unforeseen cruelty towards our freedom land. We are reaching out to America's future in quiet and bold ways. I even see a rebirth of historical values and national pride.

President George Washington wrote in his 1796 farewell address: "The unity of government which constitutes you one people is also now dear to you. It is justly so, for it is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquilly at home, your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very liberty which you so highly prize . . ." Washington's words ring across more than 200 years to reach America today and in the future.

The future of America depends on our ability to secure unity and influence the well